

## The Analysis and Review of the Relation between Theology and Culture from Paul Tillich's Perspective

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### Abstract

In the first half of the nineteenth century the dispute over the compatibility of the Christian faith with the new scientific discoveries was one of the hottest debates in the Western theologians' thoughts, especially in Germany. Most of the Protestant theologians, who were known as "liberal", believed that in the light of the new scientific discoveries, the Christian faith and theology alike needed reconstruction. These theologians came to this conclusion that religion and culture were, in practice, one and the same. Tillich's work, in between, was a continuation of such a view about religion and culture. One can say that, indeed, all his endeavors are to show a kind of coherent and logical compatibility between Christianity and the new culture. He does this in his most important book *Systematic Theology*.

In this article, along presenting and analyzing his work in this book, his success in this regard is evaluated. He believes the relation between theology and situation, which is the relation between religion and culture, is in fact the relation between "asking" and "answering". Religion and culture always constitute a unified whole, the form of which is culture and the content and essence of which is religion.

The book *Systematic Theology* is, indeed, based on this very fact. The work consists of five parts: In the first part, he correlates the religious symbol of Logos with this question of modern culture as how one can reach to the important human truth. In the second part, the religious symbol of the creator God is correlated with this modern culture's question of the infinite as how one can resist the destructive powers that threaten one's life. In the third part, he correlates the religious symbol of Jesus Christ with this question of the modern culture as how we can cure the disease of estrangement in us and in our neighbors. In the fourth part, the religious symbol of the Holy Spirit is correlated with this modern culture's question as how one can possess the genuine life, while the ethics, religious experiences and the new culture are all obscure. And finally, in the fifth part, the religious symbol of the Kingdom of God is correlated with this question as whether the history has any sense.

In order to answer the first question, Tillich seeks to analyze the structure of human reason. Therefore, Tillich, in the first part of his theological system, comes to the conclusion that the major reason for doubt and skepticism in the modern time is, in fact, the finitude of the human reason.

In the second part of his book, Tillich talks about the religious symbol of God and wants to answer this question of the modern culture as what threatens our being by non-being, and what the way is to avoid it. This topic is ontological – as the previous topic was epistemological. In this part he discusses about many detailed issues on the structure of

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existence. According to him, being and nonbeing are interrelated.

In the third part of his book, Tillich deals with one of the major issues of the modern culture, that is the estrangement and the reasons leading to it, and analyzes its relationship to Christianity's most significant symbol, i.e. Jesus Christ. In order to achieve this goal he first analyzes existence. According to him, each reality, including man's reality, has two levels: the essential level – or the essential being – and the existential level. The essential being is the potential being and the existential being is “to stand out of potentiality” (Tillich, 1975, vol. 2, p. 22). Therefore, ‘existence’ is the transition from potentiality to actuality which, according to Tillich, is in fact “falling away from what man essentially is” (Ibid).

In the fourth part of the book, Tillich seeks to find a response to this modern question: While the new culture rendered the meaning of life ambiguous, how can one recognize the genuine life? Based on that, he first studies the ambiguities of the meaning of life in the modern age and tries to look for the unambiguous life. Based on his view, life is the actualization of being and unites the two characteristics of being, i.e. the essential and the existential dimensions (Tillich, 1975, vol. 3, p. 12). Thus, the concept of life gets an ontological dimension and is not just exclusively applicable to animate beings. Different beings have different levels and dimensions, but amongst them all, only man possesses ‘spirit’. And finally by resorting to the symbol of the Kingdom of God, he deals with this principle question of the modern age that “Is history meaningful?” Through the three processes of life – which were mentioned earlier – namely: self-integration, self-creativity and self-transcendence, history moves towards the ultimate, which is in fact its fulfilment. But history, like life in general, is under the ambiguities in all the three existential dimensions; the ambiguities “which have always been felt and powerfully expressed in myth, religious and secular literature, and art” (Ibid, p. 332). The ambiguity of history in the dimension of self-integration is expressed through the terms ‘empire’ and ‘centralization’. This ambiguity is present in all phases of the church history and in all the secular movements. In the end we have some points about his principles and conclude that his views about relation between Religion and culture in modern time do not resolve problems of our age. The readers must see our point in detail.

**Keywords:** Theology, Culture, Systematic, Tillich, Compatibility

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